

SELF-APPRAISAL

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Gazing across the black waves of the ocean, my searching eyes can find no trace of land. The waters reach and grasp at an invisible form somewhere beyond my comprehension. Looking up, I see the moon and the stars stretching across the endless night sky. To the right and to the left are the infinite grains of sand which decorate the ocean shore and extend in all directions to a point beyond human vision. Glancing down, I see swirling waters caressing my two sand-covered feet, and I can look down my arms to my fingertips. And I can reach up to touch the top of my head, and know that this is all of me. I am small, and the vast universe envelops me in its greatness.

Ten minutes ago I was quite an important human being. In the company of fellow humans I could state requests, give orders, and know that I would be listened to. We were all proud as we sat around in our smug, little group and discussed the power of mankind. Someone even emphasized the strength of the individual, and we all smiled complacently. We were all very big in our pride, and very moved by our newly inspired readiness to overhaul the world. However, since it was very late and the world would certainly wait another day for its salvation, my companions went to bed. Perhaps they dreamed of great conquests and victorious battles of individuality. But I could not sleep. I was stifled and confused by all this talk of individual strength. Outside, the ocean roared, and I knew I needed to breathe.

Now, before this boundless universe, I stand naked, stripped of my individual worth, powerless in my humanity. And in my mind I can see lands far across the ocean where men are starving. I see lands where deaths are as numerous as the grains of sand beneath my feet, and the ocean waves carry to me the futile pleas of their peoples. Were I to summon up all my individual strength and all my will, I still could do nothing. Man is powerless against the universe, and one human being is only a grain of sand on the ocean shore.

In a little while I will join my companions, and maybe I, too, will dream as they do of great personal conquests. But I feel I feel I have gained in this, my new understanding of self. Whatever I may do in life will be done as well as I can do it. Yet I can realize that, in comparison to the universe, a human being is a very small thing. And after all, I am only human.

